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# OBSERVATIONS

ON THE

# Medical Platform.

AN

## INTRODUCTORY LECTURE

BY



J. ADAMS ALLEN, M. D.

PROFESSOR OF PHYSIOLOGY AND PATHOLOGY, AND ACTING PROF. OF THERAPEUTICS AND MATERIA MEDICA, IN THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN, LATE PROF. MAT. MED., THERAP. AND MED. JURISP., IN THE INDIANA MEDICAL COLLEGE; MEMBER OF THE NATIONAL MEDICAL ASSOCIATION.

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CHAPTER I

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ONE of the most striking phenomena we have occasion to contemplate, is, the very diverse impressions which the same objects of view, make upon different persons.

The external sense is, undoubtedly, ever the same; the most skillful anatomist cannot detect the minutest shadow of diversity between the eye and ear that informed the intellect which towered highest, and the eye and ear which sought no further than the exterior of lowest objects.

NEWTON saw the rolling planets in harmonious orbits in a falling apple, but even his observant eye could never scan the traces by which an Indian brave will follow his wily foeman. Here a broken twig, and there a displaced leaf; here the dew-drops shaken from the dense foliage, and there a foot-print, faint as the memory of a newly elected politician; here a tiny feather caught from the plume of the fleeing enemy by the noiseless but tell-tale branches overhanging; and there anon a sound, slight as the tread of birds upon the sward, yet knelling a death, for practiced muscles draw the shaft along the bow, and not more deadly are the shears of Atropos.

On the whole, as to the mere matter of seeing and hearing, there is but little doubt that savages, by common name, (as well perhaps as some whose very *proper* name that might be,) have the advantage of scholars

and philosophers, — in which category, of course, we place doctors, lawyers, &c., but more especially the former.

But, even supposing equal perfection in the several senses, the wonder is that we derive such remarkably different, and even opposite ideas from their report. — We all of us hear and see and read pretty much the same things in pretty much the same way. For, thanks to the conservatism of educators, while certain other rubbish of the same period, has been allowed to accumulate the green mould of oblivion and vanish, the modes of seeing and hearing prescribed by the Schoolmen of the middle ages, have been carefully saved for us. Now the chief excellence of their modes consists in the fact that they assume all men to be essentially alike, and therefore to be improved by the same process. The true typical or normal man having their own stunt figure, all who exceed this bound are to have the redundant portion lopped off, — even though, as is often the case, this may cause the removal of all that portion, usually deemed somewhat important, above the eyes and ears.

Those who fall short of this measure are to be filled up to the desired proportions, mainly, by stuffings zealously spared from the cast wardrobe of some *old* School man. When the emperor-king of Germany and Spain, disgusted by the accumulating anxieties and perplexities of his vast dominions, abdicated in favor of his son and retired to a retreat where he could indulge to his heart's content in his favorite pursuits, philosophy and gluttony, tradition relates that he amused himself endeavoring to make watches tick alike and together: failing in this, he is said to have dropped the somewhat noteworthy observation, that it did not now seem strange to him that in his most despotic days he could not make men, over whom his control was only external, think together, since even

watches would not do the same at his desire, although he could govern their interior mechanism, main spring and wheels. The very faces of the watches out-faced the king and their hands would not do his bidding ; eyes and ears, if possessed, would have only made rebellion worse.

Thus, although we have all been subjected to the same Procrustean system of education, and carefully trained to see and taste and smell and feel and hear as others, with organs identical in structure with our own, have seen and tasted and smelled and felt and heard, — nevertheless out of the crowd of external impressions, which these waiters upon the mind have carried inward, we have built up each to ourselves temples, or *mausoleums*, of ideas whose wide discrepancies defy the skill of material architects to imitate, though they ransack the archives of their art for styles regular or composite, and all chaos for materials. Alas, too often —

“ Windows and doors in nameless sculptures drest ;  
 “ With order, symmetry or taste unblest ;  
 “ Form like some bedlam statuary’s dream  
 “ The crazed creation of misguided whim.”

And even when this inner temple approximates the symmetry of harmonious system, even then —

“ Errors and dreams and thoughts half-formed abound  
 “ And crowd the baseless fabric all around ;  
 “ While at the threshold false opinions stand,  
 “ And on the step vain hope with magic wand !”

Who shall divulge the mysteries of this inner tabernacle and proclaim the identities of its varying shapes ?

There are men who, from observation of certain physical peculiarities existing among the varieties of mankind, have argued the impossibility of their descent from a common stock. But cautious scrutiny of the inner workings of the characteristic part of man, presents di-

versities exceeding infinitely any of these simple external differences. The only difficulty in the way of assigning a similar cause for them is, that we should thereby be obliged to fix upon an original ancestry as numerous as the descendants.

*Quis talia fando temperet a Lachrymis?*

The overwhelming truth remains, that facts apprehended through precisely identical organs of sense, impress themselves upon the mind as variously as the fragments within the kaleidoscope arrange themselves when the wonderful toy passes from eye to eye. The colored fragments remain the same, the reflecting surfaces the same, but the gentlest quiver of muscular fibre deranges the fickle particles, and no art of man can reproduce the forms before exhibited. Thus facts which are the stones of science, the crude stones out of which mind builds up beliefs, are reflected perhaps in regular forms to the eye of each who looks at them, but who shall number the diversities of their myriad combinations?

Nor is this confined to any particular series of facts. The simplest questions of equity and justice become confused and entangled by contradictory solutions; precedents clash, decisions opposite as the poles attract each other into heterogeneous groups, and gentlemen of the long robe wage gladiatorial contests over suppositious John Does and Richard Roes, — heightened into absolute ferocity by the enthusiasm of assured beliefs.

In the details of politics, though large allowances are to be made, from selfish interests at stake which augment real differences to colossal dimensions, still there ever have flowed and ever will flow currents of opinion counter as the floods of the St. Lawrence and the Mississippi. Men of gigantic intellects, deepened by profound study, widened by observation, strengthened by the integrity of conscientious belief, energetically declaim against each



other's views as pernicious and unwise, — and each lives to see his own and his opponent's opinions, theories and systems equally discarded, and yet there ensue none of the dire consequences the oratorical imagination so vividly portrayed.

Adams and Jefferson die upon the same day, — the nation laments for both, and follows — neither. Divided in their lives, they were by their deaths united in fortune. And so together sunk Wright and Clay, and Webster and Calhoun. Holding nothing in common but their great minds, great attainments and sterling integrity, — the memory of their differences survives only to point our moral.

And so even of the great facts of Natural and Revealed Religion; the waters springing from the same fountains diverge in every conceivable direction, until their sources would seem opposite as the antipodes; some quietly irrigating and fertilizing the fields and vales of practical life, other evaporating to clouds commingled and sported with by the winds, the storms, the tempests of controversy. Here, a beneficent principle, teaching how to live and how to die, and there, embittering the father against the son, the son against the father, and anon lifting the axe, faggot and wheel, or lighting the fires of civil or of general war. Champions "prove all creeds false except their own, and after find their own *most* false." They ravel out the seamless garments of truth and from the dishevelled threads weave endless Penelope-webs, what remains together in the morning having hues more changeable than those of the chameleon, and a variety compared to which Joseph's coat was dull and dun, sombre sameness.

Even architects and shipwrights, engineers and mathematicians, chemists and natural historians disagree fearfully, though the elements of their combinations are the

simplest known to science. The most vehement and bitter invectives which, out of the theological arena, have been hurled at the heads of antagonists have been gathered out of the most tangible qualities and operations of the most trivial of natural objects. Indeed it would seem that the less of consequence the subject matter of dispute, the more importance do the contestants place upon their own translations of its import. A man readily excuses difference of view where many are ranged in opposition, for it argues to him his own superiority to the masses ; whereas if but a few differ from him, on a matter of no consideration or interest to them, he is apt to consider it a personal slight of his own judgment on their part, and therefore as meriting his severest animadversion.

Hobbes, in the *Leviathan*, argued, in all sincerity, that war is the natural state of man, the permanent pact of society being entered into so that they could have liberty to disagree infinitely, and meanwhile not fall to blows. Whatever we may think of the philosophic account of the matter, there is now no doubt, that the largest liberty of disagreement is deemed one of the birthrights of the race. And to this common source we are disposed to refer the endless variety of beliefs, which have arisen within the peculiar domains of Medicine. The eyes and ears which apprehend the facts underlying these beliefs report the same material impressions to each observer with, however, an internal abiding diversity or even contrariety of mental arrangement. .

There are some who, taking a more superficial survey of the subject, have profanely insisted that the orthodox and heretical tenets of various medical men are the legitimate offspring of the ancient union of the priest and physician in the same personage. The functions have long been divorced, yet the doctor still manifests the proclivities of his ancient clerical partner to the polemics



of heresies and schisms, whilst the parson longs grievously to dabble in gallipots and potions, as the Israelites of old yearned for the flesh-pots, the leeks and onions of Egypt.

The strifes and contentions of medical men have furnished inexhaustible fuel for the fire of the satirist, for ages ; and the blaze waxes hotter with successive holocausts. The rattle of small arms has been succeeded by here and there a discharge of grape, to which our own attention begins to be most respectfully, but most inevitably solicited.

There are some people who seem to think this a misfortune to the profession, and as arguing a want of principle, or at least of understanding upon the part of the flying artillery of the opposition. Doleful lamentations are heard from the denizens of the venerable but rickety old castles where the craft have been snugly housed since *Æsculapius* laid the corner stones. But as a fortress which is not impregnable had better be torn down, so if the medical temple is not time, and shot, and bomb and fire proof ; if it has not within itself a solidity to be augmented, not deteriorated by the lapse of time,—let it crumble at once,—and the sooner its disconsolate rats leave, the better for all concerned.

You may rest assured that all the appliances of destructiveness are being brought to bear upon the professional homestead. Argument and satire, reason and unreason, ridicule and invective, internal dissension and external attack, all and each, have raised a very noticeable commotion within and around the old barracks. Meanwhile, the eyes and ears of so many persons bringing in so many different materials, the interior mechanism manufactures them into shapes diverse as midnight and day, and numerous as the stars of heaven. We boast our profession as Herculean ; but, even Hercules, by crafty

Juno's device, became subject to the mere mortal Eurystheus, and must needs perform the twelve labors. And so our Hercules, at the will of the Eurysthean public, must work out its salvation, albeit with fear and trembling, not by labors twelve only, but by labors infinite and enduring.

There ever has been, and is, a species of intolerance existing among medical men, of any inquisition into the arcana of their art, upon the part of the uninitiated.—The apology for this is founded upon the very plausible assertion that the facts upon which its principles are built up are of such an intricate nature, and so extensive in their range, that to judge of its correctness, the whole science must be understood. Hence the old statement, not altogether sanctioned by the author of *Novum Organum*, is held up *in terrorem*,—

*"Cuique in sua arte credendum."*

But even among adepts, a degree of diversity of opinion obtains which at once awakens the suspicion of outsiders. "When doctors disagree, *who*," in the name of all that is candid and consistent, proper and practicable, "shall decide?" In law, in politics, in religion, in philosophy, there has been, and is, precisely the same intolerance, supported upon precisely the same assumption of the necessity of a high degree of knowledge prior to judgment. But who shall decide how much is first to be known? Must we ever and ever receive all truth upon trust, and even then remain confused and bewildered in the crowd of conflicting notions? Has a man to grow gray in the study of law, or politics, or theology, or philosophy, or medicine, before he may form a correct guiding opinion with reference to his liberty, his property, mind, body and soul?

Shall Medicine wrap itself in exclusiveness as a garment, and yet hope to be honored and trusted, when our

Eurystheus demands exhibition of what manner of person it is ? The robe of exclusiveness will prove the shirt of Nessus, eating into the flesh and corroding the vitals. The "high-horse" idea will prove as harmful to Æsculapuis, as it did to his half-brother Phæthon, when he undertook from Phœbus-Apollo the task of driving the winged coursers of the sun "four in hand."

Medicine can claim no exclusive privileges—it should claim none. The corrugated eyebrow, the oracular nod, the gold-headed cane and shrewd silence on occasion, will only provoke something like the indignant lines which Otway hurled at certain other personages of high prerogatives :

"You want to lead

"My reason blindfold like a hampered lion

"Check'd of its noble vigor ; then when baited

"Down to obedient tameness, make it crouch

"And show strange tricks which you call signs of faith ;

"So silly souls are gull'd, and you get money."

It is a clear case that, at the present time, there is no doctrine so well established as not to be called in question ; there is no tenet so pervading as not to be in dispute ; there is no usage so venerable as not to be disregarded ; there is no station so exalted as not to be in danger of downfall ; there is no class so walled around with immunities as not to be liable to overthrow ; there is no belief so indubitable as not to have opponents ; none so dubious as not to have supporters ; there is no art but has its revilers ; there is no practice but has its advocates.

And this, despite the moanings of superficial croakers, is exactly as it should be. Were it otherwise, our condition would perchance be a little more celestial—in the *Chinese* sense,—a paradise of repose,—a heaven of stagnation, sloth and imbecility.

Scepticism and credulity are the upper and under surfaces of the current coin, the circulating medium of Progress. The true metal is to be found between them, and will *ring* on occasion, notwithstanding the inscriptions may not suit the critical tastes of some *dilettanti*. Base coin will be nailed to the counter, figure it over as you will. The storm of rain which the child laments, because it interferes with his idle sports, and the sluggard, because it drives him from his basking place in the rays of the sun, rejoices the heart of the farmer, for beneath its genial influence the swelling seed sends down its delicate fibres, tender buds expand, the fruitful plants unfold their blossoms, and bye and bye the fields will wave like the sea under the burden of ripening grain.

That which is not doubted is not pondered ; that which is not pondered is as likely to be erroneous as true ; and who shall number the results of a single error ?

Velleius, the Epicurean, is described as *Nil tam metuens quam ne dubitare aliqua de re videretur*, and the results of that system have passed into a proverb to denote the beatitudes of apoplectic somnolency. But Socrates, who brought down philosophy from the heavens to dwell among men, began *all* knowledge by doubting everything.

“ Who never doubted, never half believed ;

“ Where doubt, there truth is — ’tis her shadow.”

The writer or the speaker who tells us what we believe without question, might as well say nothing. It is harsh attrition only which involves light,—the more vigorous the controversy, the more power is developed in the lists, and the more likely is truth to be brought out.



“The wound of [*knowledge, as well as*] peace is surety,  
 “Surety secure, but modest doubt is call’d  
 “The beacon of the wise; the tent that searches  
 “To the bottom of the worst.”

That belief which rises “like the souls of drowned bodies from the sea” out of an ocean of doubts, is all the more persistent and changeless from having escaped its previous enthrallment.

The Roman General, Belisarius, after one of the most complete of victories, is praised by the historians because he did not cease to fear attack, doubting ever the perfection of security. This feeling it was which made the outposts wary, the entrenchments strong, the legions invincible. Medical tacticians seem to forget the overruling law of war, that continual skirmishing, even if accompanied by constant triumphs, will wear out the most numerous and best appointed army, unless profiting by experience, it strengthens what are proved weak points, enlarges its forces, redoubles its activity, ceases to rely upon fortifications which the enemy have time and again thrown down, and, more than all, secures that abundant “material aid” with which modern science is constantly striving to reinforce the dilapidated garrison.

Scepticism in medical matters is therefore not to be idly denounced, but rather hailed as the true preservative against the most harmful of delusions—the delusion that all is well enough as it is, that *we* are certainly right. That which is not questioned or disputed is no more of necessity true, than that every straight road is the road to heaven.

But what shall be said of the other side of the coin whereon credulity is depicted:

*Monstrum, horrendum, ingens, cui lumen ademptum !*

That blind infatuation which impels men to believe whatsoever is most strange, most repellent to common



sense, most marvellous, most impossible! Surely out of the very quintessence of human weakness it will be difficult to derive a light to shine along the path of progress, but rather from its reeking elements *ignes fatui* will ever and anon go up, and dance and glimmer over bog and pitfall all too unsafe for human tread, yet tempting still the benighted traveller. Nevertheless, even as the ugly and venomous toad hath oftentimes a precious jewel in its head, and most ill favored shells yield up the richest pearls, so out of this comes wisdom and instruction.

Credulity is but an exaggeration of one of the most necessary attributes of the human mind. Without belief the deductions of reason would be dead; the observation of the senses would be unproductive; the long train of influences which develop action and expression would be broken; and the galvanic flame of thought would cease to leap from plate to plate, combining the intangible and fleeting into permanent and fruitful forms.

Belief is the fixed point about which ever revolves the universe of matter and of mind. A pensile position is abhorrent to our nature, hence we grasp even shadowy appearances if so be they assume the shape of truth, or such a nearness to its likeness as to deceive our purblind optics. Thus this belief without due foundation becomes the prevailing characteristic of uninformed minds,—minds hungering and thirsting after truth—in the absence of knowledge grasping the apparent rather than the real.

“Generous souls  
Are still most subject to credulity”

For believing that the same sincerity animates their instructors which themselves feel, they eagerly receive even erroneous teachings.

But truth itself cannot be tested by the mass of mankind, having to be received, if received at all, not upon defensible grounds of belief, but by sheer credulity.—The success of high moral or political principles rests to a very considerable extent upon the same apprehension. As the subject becomes more and more recondite, as Medicine is most certainly, the greater is the necessity for the exercise of this confidence of belief upon trust. With the uninstructed, therefore, truth and error, each depend for their reception upon precisely the same much abused quality of mind.

It is worth while to notice that medical men of the "old school," demand implicit confidence of the public upon grounds of reason, in nineteen cases out of twenty, identical with those employed by every class interested in bolstering up old error. Whether it is worth while to continue this kind of warfare when it has failed every where else, and whilst ample defences of the legitimate sort are at hand, is a question which by a mind of ordinary sagacity, is easily solved.

There is, however, a phase of this same credulity, which might well attract attention, as it affects, not only the uninitiated, but moreover, and particularly, the expert. This is when out of the waxen elements of incautious belief the blind idol of dogmatism is moulded: when the half-instructed turns instructor, and the deceived turns deceiver. *Fingunt simul creduntque*, as Tacitus has it. That is a mental vice of the most deplorable character, which mistakes its own crude beliefs for the absolute certainties of ultimate truth,—when the dead forms of perverted opinion are set up as pillars of Hercules, beyond which there shall be no sailing, no discovery.

This is the credulity especially, dangerous to cultivat-

ed minds. The assumption of formulae as representatives, may be allowable while knowledge is in making, but to call these ultimates, and dogmatize upon them as points upon which the human mind must forever remain in slothful quiescence, may seem helpful at present, but will prove the bane of future progression. Now and then a class or interest may convince the public, for a time, that it is best to accept beliefs on certain points at their hands only, and even cause laws to be enacted whereby the public power becomes pledged to say to opinion and practice, "thus far shalt thou come but no further!" But even if successfully enforced, where is the surety that truth, as well as error, is not repressed? Has any class or any profession embodied in itself the whole or even any extraordinary maximum of the absolutely unquestionable? When they die, shall wisdom die with them?

Out upon such shallow philosophy! "With as good plea might the dead palsy boast to a man, 'It is I that free you from stitches and pains, and the troublesome feeling of cold and heat, of wounds and strokes; if I were gone all these would molest you.' The winter might as well vaunt against the spring,—'I destroy all noisome and rank weeds; I keep down all pestilent vapors, Yea, and all wholesome herbs, and all fresh dews by your hide-bound frosts; but then the gentle west wind shall open the fruitful bosom of the earth, thus overgirded by your imprisonment, then the flowers put forth and spring, and then the sun shall scatter the mists, and the manuring hand of the tiller shall root up all that burdens the soil without thanks to your bondage.'"

With the increase of enlightenment, scepticism will necessarily become more and more prevalent; as belief lessens in that which is old and known, so will credulity

grasp all the more earnestly upon the untried and unknown.

Medical veterans may rage with awful front, and as they exhibit their honorable scars and mutilated limbs, may denounce the ingratitude and monstrous perversion of the times, but this outlay of vital force may as well be husbanded for other purposes. No "Trades-Union" Association, no cunningly worded protective statute, no *ore rotundo* declamation, nor organized "Kappa Lambda" Guards can repress the Spirit of the Times, which, like other spirits delights in winds, and waves, and storms. — There are divers plain spoken individuals with keen optics, who, after all *canting* is over, stand ready to say :— The medical profession is a respectable profession no doubt, and the idea of its *savants* may be very weighty and worthy of all consideration, but if its internal *truth*—*power* will not suffice to keep it up to its present, or restore it to its past position, then, in the name of all its past and present lights, forbear adding to the unsightly appearance of the old fortress, the adventitious aid of props, that everywhere else throughout Christendom have but added to the energy of attack, through conviction of internal weakness. Heaven save old *Æsculapius* from being strangled by the mufflers, his friends are wrapping around him, to keep off the cold air from his tonic-needing body !

Perhaps one of the most conspicuous of professional foibles, is its acute sensibility to ridicule and satire. The artist, the author and paragraphist task their ingenuity to caricature us. The advocates of new systems, build them up by ridiculing the old. They laugh us into paroxysms of wrath, and then gather up the arrows launched at them, as proofs that they are themselves of no little consequence. The puny citizens of Lilliput, enraged



poor Gulliver by their tiny weapons, although he could carry their navy in his hands, and it took the cloth of their entire population to make him an overcoat. Little things exasperate, when against "a sea of troubles" we coolly "take up arms."

But satire, paradoxical as it may seem, is one of the appropriate tests of truth. "Satire strikes high and adventures dangerously at the most eminent." But it must be recollected, that it is one thing to "seek how to raise a laugh at everything, and quite another to seek in everything what justly may be laughed at. "They deride you," said one to Diogenes, "But I am not derided," replied the consistent cynic. Mere levity of the thorn-crackling kind pertains to fools and clowns, but there are times when in the serious uncasing of a grand imposture, as Milton says, "there can be mixed such a grim laughter as may appear at the same time in an austere visage, devoid of levity or insolence; which moreover has a strong and sinewy force in teaching and confuting, and in the examination of any subject of importance, if it be harmful to be angry, and withal, to cast a lowering smile when the properest object calls for both, it will be long enough ere any be able to say, why those two most rational faculties of the human intellect, anger and laughter, were first seated in the breast of man."

The force of satire lies principally in this, that whereas mere pride of opinion may incline men to maintain their old dogmas, after every vestige of sober argumentative support has been effectively removed, the shafts of ridicule will then dislodge them at once. Thus —

"Jesting decides great things

"Stronglier and better oft than earnest can,"

Positions will still be retained though dangerous ;—



make them ridiculous, and the fight is over. It is, however to be recollected, that Truth in its simplicity and purity, is unapproachable by ridicule. There is a grandeur about TRUTH which compels sobriety ; for—

“The eternal years of God are hers,”

and the satirist would as soon trifle with the Supreme, or attack the rounded arch of heaven.

“When Satire flies abroad on falsehood’s wing

“Short is her life and impotent her sting ;

“But when to truth allied, the wound she gives

“Sinks deep, and to remotest ages lives.”

Then let it be applied to the art in question, and if in the crucible of trial that fire causes the art’s dissolution, welcome the event ; for better is solid truth in howsoever homely form, than fleeting falsehood apparelled in shining robes. And if truth be within, but the habiliments unseemly, the sooner the quick apprehension of the satirist discloses the incongruity, the more speedily will its original beauty, power and sublimity, be developed, like as the sun, —

“Who doth permit the base contagious clouds

“To smother up his beauty from the world,

“That, when he please again to be himself,

“Being wanted, he may be more wondered at,

“By breaking through the foul and ugly mists

“Of vapours that did seem to strangle him.

Men of the present time, accustomed to inquiry, wandering into the region of medicine, cannot fail to be struck with surprise, to see how antiquated are the weapons which its professed supporters use in its defence. — Living truths breathe the chill atmosphere of the vault. Groping curiously about, investigators may discover traces of life among multitudinous fossil formulæ. The waves of past antiquity have piled the shores with curious images where life has left its impress, and instead of pointing to vital truths and immortal life-forces, with Lycurgus saying, “These be the walls of Sparta,” we

creep behind the relics of old time and say, "These be our walls!" Strange infatuation to cling to the mouldering shams of effete ages, whilst the present concentrates in one intensest focus, the light and heat of all time. But the day for shams has past. Time has been when the Persian enemy could route the Egyptians, by putting an array of cats and ichneumons in the van of their army, which as their ancient tutelary deities, the poor Egyptians dare not attack. But the superstition has been laid aside with the things that were, and hereafter let the enemy beware of trusting in cats or ichneumons !

What matters it if we trace our lineage back to Hippocrates, or Apollo even? Is truth the offspring of years, or is it not rather sprung of God and Nature which are eternal?

What matters it that we boast the light which has shone along the professional highway? The poor candles that grievously needed snuffing even in the day of their bearers, may have smitten us with a blindness compared to which that of Saul of Tarsus was clear vision.

What matters it that Hippocrates and Aristotle and Plato, Galen, Rhazes, Avicenna, Aetius and Celsus, Harvey and Boerhaave, Hunter, Broussais, Sydenham and Rush, have aided in the erection of this pyramid,—if all their labors have converged to an apex upon which our modern temple finds insecure support? It is not men, nor time, nor circumstance which evoke of necessity the clear and warrantable body of truth. For truth, as such, is utterly independent of the media through which it is transmitted to us; our acceptance or explanation of it, are in nowise its measure or its proof.

What matters it, that authors, venerable with antiquity, or brilliant with the glow of late years, combine

to say, "This is the way of truth, walk ye in it?" Are we to rest satisfied with beholding the bright countenance of truth, in what are at the best but partial mirrors, and too often but deformed counterfeit presentments? Perhaps these authors had a reason for the faith in them, — perhaps not, how shall we determine? The contaminated reason of man refracts the divine effluence into the variegated shapes and grotesqueness of mere imagery. So ancient Aaron of finest gold and jewels formed a mute and powerless calf, and sacreligiously asserted, "These be thy Gods, O Israel!"

What matters it that most grave and reverend doctors in the law of medicine in solemn conclave declare, "These are the highest deductions of human reason; these, the strongest teachings of experience; these, the ultimates upon which the human mind must rest!" So other arts and other sciences have been enclosed, but the outward pressure has burst the feeble barriers, and Antiquity, and Precedent, and Opinion, and the assumed Results of Experience, have been commingled in confusion worst confounded, until Order, Heaven's first law, has called the living productive forms of eternal truth out of the wreck of foolish wisdom. "If men have once heartily espoused the *reasoning* or *thinking habit*, they will not easily be induced to lay the practice down; they will not at an instant be arrested, and made to stand and yield themselves, when they come to such a certain boundary, landmark, post or pillar, erected here or there (for what reason may probably be guessed), with the inscription of a *ne plus ultra*."

We are well aware that there is a philosophy current, expressing itself in various forms, which claims that the mass of mankind are incompetent to take care of themselves. And this not only politically, but physically and morally. This feeling finds exit in protective laws — in

statutory regulations of matters which rulers have no more real business with, than with the winds of heaven ; in canonical decrees where inspiration is silent ; in piti-ful beseechings of legislative powers to guard the dear people from the ruthless wolves *outside* the profession, while silence contemptuously answers the pertinent enquiry, "*Who shall guard the Shepherds?*"

There is a legend that one of the old fathers, having an intense admiration of the moral virtues of the hea-then Emperor Trajan, prayed so fervently for his soul that it was released from hell ; with, however, a caveat to the holy father, that he should make no more such petitions. And so it happens, somewhat curiously, that the medical profession though receiving many of its richest appointments from precisely identical movements with those now so much deprecated, are most solicitous for persistent caveats for the future. It so appears, how-ever, that the waters are never more likely to be salu-tiferous than when the troubling angel steps in and dis-turbs them, — a fact which the world is beginning to get more and more sensible of, and consequently more inex-orably deaf to interested objurgations.

Why can it not be seen that the various systems of medical practice now afloat are, whether rightly or wrongly instituted, but so many grand experiments for the instruction of this and future times? The great globe we inhabit was collected out of formless chaos ; and so out of this very formless farrago of confused opinions, bye and bye, the tree of knowledge will draw nutrient sap, and hence extend its heavy branches wide and high, none the less glorious to look upon because its roots spring from corrupt fermenting elements.

But it may be inquired, must the teachings of experi-ence, the advisings of the great, and the deductions of the learned be abandoned for the winds and waves of a



boundless eclecticism? Certainly not; compass and rudder and sails are well and necessary, but not provided the ship remains ever at anchor. The advice of the prophet is apposite: "Stand upon the ancient ways and consider what way be the right and good way, and walk therein."

Much of this extreme reverence for the past, among medical men, depends upon their over estimate of what is somewhat vaguely termed experience, and which the past only is supposed to have had opportunity to gather together into noteworthy dimensions. There has been much of error with regard to the limits of the truth which experience most certainly teaches. "The greatest number of well assorted facts on a particular subject constitutes experience, whether these facts were culled in five years or fifty. These facts in order to have the force of experience, must be such as can be appreciated; observations that will instruct, must be observations having the perfection of completeness; and either of these transcending a certain degree of complexity become confused and inappreciable to the majority of observers. Certain thousands of years with their accumulated phenomena, their contradictory observations and deductions, with the proofs open to all, will teach if nothing else can, that "perpetually repeated and ever accumulating experiences will fail to teach, *until there exist the mental conditions required for the assimilation of them.*—Nay, when they are assimilated, it is very imperfectly; the truth they teach is only half understood, even by those supposed to understand it best."

In vain have we eyes if we see not; in vain have we ears if we hear not! In vain does the sense send inward its tell-tale messengers, if the light which is in us be darkness! If the harmony of a system, like an



Orphean lyre, lulls the Cerberus of thought ; if the glitter of discovery blinds the hundred eyes of Argus perception ; or the cords of dogmatic prescription tie up the hundred hands of Briarean reason, — what better are they than Lethean obliviousness, Cimmerian darkness or nerveless death ?

There can be no real belief unless the sincerest toleration, even of the most strange, fanciful and erratic of opinions, is safely established ; unless the most full and complete examination by whomsoever inquirer is freely permitted ; unless the most careful comparison, dictated by whatsoever mood of mind, is most perfectly allowed.

Why should Medicine ask for other favor ? As well may the oak say to the pine, "I am better than thou," as Medicine strive to invest itself with a pseudo-sanc-tity, which the unsparing hand of progress has stripped from every other system, every other opinion, every other belief.

Here then is the *stand point of view*. Medicine is to be looked upon and studied, precisely as all other arts and sciences are looked upon and studied. The truths upon which it is assumed to be based, are to be tested as all other truths are tested ; and when they cannot abide the same, let them be mercilessly discarded. A little diamond is better than a rocky mountain. If the science or art shrink by the process indicated, into less imposing dimensions, let it be so ! Better is it to be a small but living seed, than a rotten trunk though of colossal magnitude.

In the infancy of knowledge, when learning was in the hands of few ; when facts were scanty and ideas ill-defined and shapeless ; when knowledge was literally power to its possessors, there must have ever been temptation to spread over a large superficies, — eking

out, here and there, by assumption and hypothesis, the better to overwhelm the imagination of observers ; just as skilful tacticians, in default of large forces, extend their camp fires, and scatter their drums and trumpets over a vast space, the better to inspire their enemies with dismay.

And, indeed, we are half tempted to believe this must have been the case with medicine, whenever we look upon the ponderous (*not tombs, but*) tomes which have descended to us from the olden times ; the immense pile of which our modern bibliographists are constantly enlarging, as the Titans piled high Pelion upon Ossa.

Alas ! Alas ! of the making of books there is no end ! The satirist well tells us, "that the Grecian eloquence had no other way of expressing it, than by saying : 'That in the regions far to the North it is hardly possible to travel, the very air is so replete with feathers !'"

But be not disheartened, these huge monstrosities are not the normal offspring of science, but bantlings

" Deformed, unfinished, sent before *their* time

" Into this breathing world, scarce half made up."

The huge dragnet of time has gathered, from the depths of the old, and the shallows of the new, a startling draught, but when we come to sorting, then we find our gettings "growing smaller by degrees, and beautifully less."

Instead of anathematizing idly, we have need to rejoice that the pressure of "hard times" upon the profession, is about condensing the spongy texture whereof it is composed into something like solidity. Not that new books should no more be written, but that if written, they may have the resemblance to their predecessors that a man has to food, whereof indeed in a life he devours many tons, but himself grows only to a moderate weight. Or as Bacon says, —let them become as the

serpent of Moses that devoured the serpents of the enchanter.

Unfortunately medical bookmakers happening upon some single idea, or at best half a dozen such, instead of expressing that or them only, as begins to be done in most other sciences, straightway seem wafted as by a divine afflatus to the haven of authorship, and rake the annals of professional history to rehash all its voluminous products into a new form wherein to insert their own starveling pets.

Hence of scores and hundreds, and indeed we may almost say thousands of professional works, all the differences that could not be summed up and given in a few dozen pages, consist of substance altogether remote from the subject matter. Points of arrangement, wording, rhetoric, typography and date inflict upon us the rest.

The medical journals of the day are replete with illustrations of this tendency to diffusiveness, reproduction and supererogation, as well as of that vicious habit of minds which ever carries thought, not forward, but in cycles only.

Things which were novel so long since that the world itself was but little their elder, are ever and anon ushered again into notice, with a flourish of trumpets worthy a Roman ovation ; and then elaborated, and diffused, and diffused, and diffused until they sicken the intelligent reader, as the robust man turns from the thin gruel of the invalid.

In the language of the weighty knight, Sir John,—  
 “If I had a thousand sons, the first human principle I would teach them, should be, — to forswear these thin potations and addict themselves” not to “sack” but to habits of thought, logical reasoning, quick perception

and legitimate induction that would enable them to separate the thin particles of meal floating in the "weak, wishy-washy, everlasting flood"—called professional literature, in hope hereafter by the help of time and patience, some might adhere in such consistence that profit might ensue therefrom.

It is but justice, however, to say that the medical journals of the day, in strength, condensation, practical utility and sound sense are ages in advance of the formal treatises, — *quibus inficitur, potius quam perficitur*.—The journals have borrowed not a little of vitality and apothegmatic force from contemporary secular papers ; —but the books smell of the mouldy centuries, and we are fain to open them as Mr. Gliddon takes off the wrappings of mummified Egyptian princesses,—somewhat uncertain of the result, though the hieroglyphics seem to name them distinctly enough.

Let us not be understood as loosely decrying the work of indefatigable medical scholars, but as insisting upon this cardinal principle, that in books and articles which treat upon medicine as a science or practice, so much only be set down as is first *true*, in the absolute sense of scientific truth : or if proposed for inquiry and discovery, then that it be something not dug out of the catacombs where it was deposited on receiving capital execution ages since.

We want a living, breathing, productive literature,—not a barren, dead, marshalling of old errors.

We want a condensation of what is beyond all controversy true, from the vapors of language, froth and declamation, into which it has been permitted to expand.

We want that which is only probable, to be rigorously kept apart from the unquestionable.

We want no practice which depends upon the mere dogma of a faction, the opinion of a name, or the loose



event of hypothesis, but that which springs as naturally from knowledge of the facts, as the flower and the fruit from the juices of the plant which support them. .

We want the old authors to be ranged as milestones *behind*, to mark the path gone over, and not piled up as a wall to impede the way onward.

We want, and like Diogenes we would search for them with a lantern, *Men*,—men not only rich in professional lore, but so prepared by nature, study, discipline and cultivation, that out of the barbaric profusion of medical literature and rubbish, they may, as by occult masonic skill, construct a new Temple, where Science shall sit enshrined, and the priests of Art go up with confidence to quaff inspiration.

We want the zealous student, not the studious zealot.

We want,—but space and time forbid enumeration of our needs, which shame the line,—

“Man wants but little here below.”

Yet there is reason for wonder that, amid the confusion of search and the blindness of the seekers, so much has been wrested from ignorance.

The laws of nature and of art spring, like the waters of the Nile, from obscure fountains in regions peopled by fancy with strange forms and fantastic fleeting, changeful shadows, yet the accumulating waters irrigate the waste desert, and by art assisted flow out upon the otherwise arid plains, causing the wilderness to blossom like the rose, and the parched sands to bring forth foodful plants. Thus although the origin of our profession is lost in the dim clouds of mythic record, and ruins have marked its advance, and the false and the deceitful still entangle and weaken it, nevertheless there is within all a truth which must prevail, and a genetic force that will beget ever new and beneficent results. In this belief let



us await with confidence and assurance its future destiny, meeting, with merited scorn, all attempts to smuggle even Truth into general acceptance by attiring it in the garish robes of Falsehood.

Let old Saturn devour his puny children ; whilst young Jupiter supplies an Olympus of potential agencies.

The discordant mutterings of the voices coming up from the depths of an obscure antiquity impress some even more than the voice coming down from the throne of the Omniscient ; whilst others mistake the lengthened shadows of the Orient for the noontide revelation. Nevertheless the Old and the New are not as the conflicting principles of the Manichaen system, but rather the Isis and Orisis of Egyptian myth, prolific of the beautiful, the useful and the true.

Finally and forever, let this be borne uppermost, that the eye and ear, yea, all the senses fail when mind is at fault ; then that mind itself, whatever its power, may not arrive at truth in Medicine, unless elevated by appropriate instruction, enlarged by liberal acquirements, strengthened by suitable discipline, it can seize and maintain the true and right STAND POINT OF VIEW.



